
COLOMBIA

Using Cue Cards to Foster Speaking and Writing

Edmundo Mora

University of Nariño, Pasto

The purpose of this article is to show how cue cards can be used to give students practice speaking or writing English in real situations. Four aspects of each activity will be described:

a. MATERIALS. By materials I mean the kind and number of cards that the teacher will use to carry out the activity in class. The cards can be made of thin cardboard, 12 cm x 7 cm in size. The names and/or numbers printed on them should be legible. In some activities, I suggest the use of pictures. These should be big enough for the students to see and should not have text, which distracts the students. Also, they should be glued onto cardboard with margins of, say, 5 cm on each side.

b. PROCEDURE. In most cases, the students will work in pairs or small groups after I have modeled how an exercise should be carried out. I also use *cue words* to help students initiate conversation. These are especially useful when the students are not familiar with English structure; however, students should have the freedom to form their own questions and answers. The cue words may be given in scrambled order to challenge the students and to allow them to apply their knowledge of the language. I also include some questions for conversation.

c. LANGUAGE ITEMS. In this section, I suggest grammatical features that can be

practiced. However, the final objective is not to teach grammar, but rather to give students an opportunity to practice English thoughtfully. Naturally, the grammar covered should be reviewed in the feedback session of the class.

d. FOLLOW UP. This section contains ideas for reinforcement and further practice.

Some recommendations for using these activities are:

- The activities are not intended to fill a whole class period. They can be more profitably used for a specific stage of the class, preferably for *active* use (exploitation) of recently studied material
- The items to be classified, arranged, etc., should be presented in scrambled order to challenge the students' imaginations and thinking powers.
- The activities are intended for students at the intermediate level.
- While the students are working with the cards, they should be encouraged to use the target language at all times.
- Certain activities lend themselves to being timed. Timing encourages competition and motivation.

RELATED WORDS

a. MATERIALS. One card per group. Each card should have one word on it. If the teacher wishes he may want to write a different word on each card so that each group works with a different word.

b. PROCEDURE. The class is arranged into groups and each group is given a card. Let us take by way of example a card that bears the word *book*. The students are told that they are to think of a word that has to do with *book*. Each new word provided has to be related to the preceding one. In other words, the lexical items have to exhibit a sequence among themselves: e.g., book-library-building-city-department (state)-country-continent-earth.

When the groups have finished providing the words, each group begins explaining out loud the sequence observed by the words provided. In the case of the aforementioned words, the same group of students came up with the following explanation:

The idea is that you will find many books in a library. A library is located in a building. Buildings are part of a city. A city is a part of a department or state which in turn belongs to a country. Various countries make up a continent. And finally we have

various continents which make up the planet on which we live—Earth.

cue words:

- books - like - you - ?
- library - town - there - is - ?
- books - read - you - many - ?
- people - city - do - you - what - ?
- country - like - your - ?

additional questions for conversation:

1. Does your father read a lot of books? If so, what kind of books does he read?
2. How often do you think students should go to the library? What about you? How often do you go?
3. Where is the library in your city located?
4. Is Pasto modernizing? If so, why?
5. How would you define the present situation in your country?

c. LANGUAGE ITEMS.

frequency words such as *often, always*
-s in 3rd-person singular present tense
prepositions *in, on*
present progressive
it as subject of a sentence
to as in *want to go*

d. FOLLOW UP. The students are organized into pairs. One student describes something and the other must identify what it is. This exercise easily turns into an interesting conversational exchange. After one student identifies the object, they exchange roles.

WHERE WOULD YOU MOST PROBABLY FIND . . . ?

a. MATERIALS. One card per group. Each card should contain the question: "Where would you most probably find . . . ?" Some possible options to complete the sentence are to be written under the question, i.e.,

Where would you most probably find

- a pair of shoes?
- a pen?
- a desk?
- some money?
- some sugar?
- apples?

b. PROCEDURE. The students are organized into groups and each group receives a card. The teacher tells his pupils that they are to think of possible places where they might find the items listed under the question. They should be asked to tackle the items one by one. The group that supplies the most answers to each of the items is the winner.

cue words:

- shoes - what - made of - are - ?
- shoes - expensive - cheap - or - ?
- shoe stores - are - many - there - Pasto - ?
- sugar - made of - what - ?
- sugar - cheap - expensive - is - ?

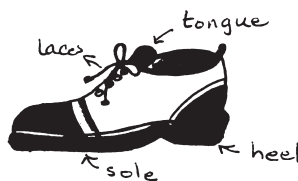
additional questions for conversation:

1. Where do you buy your shoes? Where is your favorite shoe store located?
2. How many kinds of shoes are there?
3. Why do you think young boys prefer to wear tennis shoes?
4. In your opinion, which country manufactures the best tennis shoes?
5. Do you put a lot of sugar in your coffee?

c. LANGUAGE ITEMS.

verbal expression *to be made of*
how many/how much
proper word order of attributive adjectives
the causative
the superlative form of adjectives
to with joining verbs in their simple form (*need to go, have to do, etc.*)
-s in 3rd-person singular present tense
modal verbs

d. FOLLOW UP. The teacher passes out cards to each group. Each card contains a drawing of one of the items listed on the cards that were first distributed. Then, the teacher asks the students to identify the constituent parts of the item shown.



Once they have done this, they write a short composition in which they mention the places where they can find the item depicted in the drawing.

LEARNING ABOUT GEOMETRY

a. MATERIALS. One blank card per student.

b. PROCEDURE. Working in pairs each student receives a blank card. He/she is required to draw as many geometric figures as possible on the card, repeating any figure he/she wishes, i.e., triangles, rectangles, etc. The students are not supposed to see each other's cards, so they are asked to sit back to back and begin

questioning each other as to what they drew.

A: How many triangles did you draw?

B: I drew two. How about you?

A: I only drew one.

B: How many squares did you draw?

A: I drew one. What about you?

B: I also drew one.

cue words:

- drawing - you - good - at - are - ?
- important - geometry - why - is - ?
- geometric - like - figures - you - ?
- square - you - define - could - ?
- angle - is - what - ?

additional questions for conversation:

1. Does drawing require special skills?
2. What does a good artist need in order to do his job efficiently?
3. How many angles does a triangle have? Do you know what kind they are?
4. Do you know what perimeter is?
5. Do you know the formula to find the area of a square?

c. LANGUAGE ITEMS.

idiom *be good at*
adverbs ending in *-ly*
how many
past tense of certain irregular verbs (*draw-drew*)
the pronoun *one*
possessive pronouns
polite expressions (*please . . .*)
do, does, and did auxiliaries
embedded questions
prepositions *in, on, at*
perfect tenses

d. FOLLOW UP. Working in pairs, each student is to "Think of the geometric figures he/she has seen in school, at home, etc." Then each one writes sentences mentioning the places where geometric figures can be seen and each student shares these sentences with his/her partner.

Edmundo J. Mora
is a full professor in the Language Program at the University of Nariño, Pasto, Colombia, where he teaches English and foreign-language methodology.